

Bio politics of Gendered Violence in Sahadat Hasan Manto's Stories, "Sharifan", "Xuda Ki Kasam" and "Ghate Ka Sauda": Reflections on Authentic Testimonies of Trauma

Uttam Poudel

Lecturer, Department of English, Nepal Sanskrit University, Balmeeki Campus, Kathmandu, Nepal

Abstract—Saadat Hasan Manto, in his mentioned stories explores the gendered violence during the tragic event of the Partition of India. By foregrounding the plight and predicament of abducted, displaced and raped women caused by the biopolitical violence, the violence in which human bodies and lives are targets and focal points of politics and war, he attempts to show the most horrible picture of the Partition and its consequences. Due to the patriarchy - unleashed violence perpetrated on women they are ultimately reduced into homo sacer and muselmann as conceptualized by Giorgio Agamben. Muselmann is a specific form of life which is alive but dead, and dead but alive. The female characters, who suffer from brutal rape, abduction and mutilation in the stories, are nothing but the abject object, which speak the vastness of trauma without speaking. In other words, the victimized women characters and their somatic testimonies verge on the authenticity of their traumas. While dramatizing the pervasive effects of gender violence during the precarious time of the Partition of India by keeping the falsity of religious and political rhetoric of the Partition violence at bay, Manto projects the testimonies of the traumatic events of the Partition without perpetuating the cycle of revenge and recrimination. He does not see the perpetrators as Muslims or non-Muslims, Indians or Pakistanis; rather he just sees and depicts them as human beings with all their wilderness and barbarity. By executing the unmediated testimony of the Partition violence, and combining evil and suffering within it, he also captures the specificity of the Partition violence without being provocative in any way. In doing so, he brings in the humanitarian and moral perspective on the Partition holocaust, which helps evoke the therapeutic effect of the trauma of the Partition— and that effect is the hallmark of the aesthetic of the literature of violence or trauma.

Keywords—Trauma, Violence, Testimony, Partition, Authenticity.

"The victims of rape are not included in the public rite of mourning about the lost war; they are not venerated as heroines, and they are not awarded any compensation" (qtd. in Hromadzic 7).

Saadat Hasan Manto is a noted progressive Urdu writer. Many of his stories focus on the sense of despair, dislocation and trauma by the Partition of Pakistan and India in 1947. The writings of the mentioned writer vividly recreate the angers and horrors of this period and the trauma of the refugees especially, of women uprooted and victimized by the demarcation of arbitrary borders.

The selected partition stories of the mentioned writer attempt to capture the state of trauma. The word "trauma"

is taken from Greek language which means wound. Doctors tend to use it as Beerendra Pandey in his book, *Historiography of Partition* says, as "a serious external or internal damaged of the body, not necessarily a piercing by an object" (1). Psychologists tend to use it "with reference to condition called PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) by which they mean a kind of emotional or psychological blow landed on the victim by an injurious and / or life-threatening event" ("*Historiography*" 1). Such event generates such a terrible blow that it keeps coming up in the consciousness of the victim even much after the occurrence of the event. Psychologists, as Pandey says, "attribute the outbreak of such risk factors as assault, domestic abuse, prison stay, rape, riot, terrorism and war"

(“Historiography” 1). The Partition violence as the most traumatic period in the history of modern India has still remained in the collective memory of Hindustanis and Pakistanis. Such trauma has been captured in the mentioned narratives of Manto.

The researcher here claims that the female characters in the stories of the mentioned writer, who undergo with trial, trouble and tribulation with a slow realization of loss and a deep sense of sorrow amidst hallucinatory state of mind due to the trauma, are nothing but *homo sacers*, or “bare lives” victimized by the biopolitical violence of Partition riots. These characters are simply in liminal position—neither totally alive nor totally dead. They are fated to live in a kind of suspended state. Their bodies speak themselves about their plight and predicament. In other words, they are the most traumatized ones suffering from brutal murder, rape and mutilation being ultimately reduced into the position of *muselmann* or mere abject objects, whose somatic testimonies verge on the authenticity of their traumas. I have discussed as to how female characters in the Partition narratives of Manto undergo with biopolitical violence. Before it, it is imperative to discuss about biopolitics.

Biopolitics refers to how politics and government policy directly impact on biological aspect of people's lives. Drawing from Michel Foucault, biopolitics can be understood as method of examination in which the state controls people through political power. Biopolitics can also be discussed as to how the biological features of human beings are measured, observed, and understood through the execution of different forms of state mechanisms.

In his article “Biopolitical and beyond: On the reception of a vital Foucauldian notion” Thomas Lemke says, the term “biopolitics” “designates what brought life and its mechanism into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life” (1). Along with the emergence of modern techniques and technologies, disciplining the individual body and the regulation of body of the population has become a frequent occurrence. Expressing the idea of the connection between the beginnings of political modernity with biopolitics, Lemke further says:

According to Foucault, biopolitics marks the threshold of political modernity since it places life at the center of political order. In this theoretical perspective, there is an intimate link between the constitutions of a capitalist society and the birth of biopolitics: “Society's control over individuals was accomplished not only through consciousness

or ideology but also in the body and with the body. For capitalist society, it was biopolitics, the biological, the corporal, that mattered more than anything else. (1)

Here, highlighting the Foucauldian concept of biopolitics, Lemke points out that capitalist society not only controls with consciousness and ideology but also in the body and with the body. In other words, the bodies of people hold great value in modern states and politics.

In the last chapter of his first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault talks about the notion of sovereign subjectivity in modern politics and warfare. In this book, he discusses on the notion of biopower and biopolitics, which implicates the sovereign power over life and the management of life. The crucial part of his argument is that this power is exercised through the sovereign's “right to take life or let live” (136). To put it more explicitly, the way in which power is exercised by actually taking life, allowing certain lives to live on, and controlling life. He further explains that the sovereign exercises the right to life by implementing the right to kill, or by ceasing to kill, and this power was put into practice through death. This power can also be explained as “a right of seizure: of things, time, bodies, and ultimately life itself that “culminated in the privilege to seize hold of life in order to suppress it” (136). The sovereign; therefore, is the operator of the life and bodies it governs.

As Andre Duarte says, at present the “states have enacted repressive policies against immigrants and refugees, political movements that organize the unemployed, non-conformists of all sorts, displaced and homeless people, among many other undesirable social groups” (2). These people cannot be incorporated into the capitalist system of globalized production and consumption hence, regarded as undesirables or misfits to be disposed off.

In order to further clarify the idea of biopolitical violence and reduction of citizens into “expendable” or “undesirable” it will be pertinent to discuss the idea of Italian political Philosopher, Giorgio Agamben. Agamben, in his book, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, presents a provocative theory on the relation between politics and life, especially the “hidden point of intersection between the Juridico-institutional and biopolitical models of power” (6). He begins the book by providing an explanation that in Greek, there are two kinds of life: *zoe* and *bios*. *Zoe* is the natural life that is “the simple fact of living common to all living beings” (1). *Bio*, on the other hand, is a special kind of life that is only possessed by people, who are valued and qualified, or “the

form or way of living proper to an individual or a group” (1).

Agamben expands on the Foucauldian notion of biopolitics by introducing *homo sacer* or bare\ sacred man— “the life of *homo sacer* (sacred man), who may be killed and yet not scarified” (8). These lives are disposable and signify importance only being included in law and politics in the form of exclusion or by the capacity to be killed. What is powerful in his elaboration of *homo sacer* is that Agamben captures its unique positioning. The bare\ sacred man (life) was originally began to overlap with the political, and in the end, “exclusion and inclusion, outside and inside, bios and zoe, right and fact enter into a zone of irreducible indistinction” (9). Nicholas Chare asserts:

Bare life is not, therefore, natural life. It is not zoe. It is a liminal state occurring between bios and zoe, between life styled by law and natural life, between language and non-language. The most extreme example of bare life in the camps is embodied by the *Muselmann*. (45)

Muselmann is a term used to describe those, who through exposure to starvation, deprivation, violence and brutality experience a fundamental loss of will and consciousness. Agamben finds *muselmann* as a limit condition of human life. This term also refers to those in camps who have reached such a state of physical disrepair and existential disregard that one hesitates to call them living as they simply look like living corpses that move inevitably toward death in the camps.

In the light of above-discussed theories of trauma and biopolitics, the researcher analyzes three stories by Manto— “Sharifan” (Bitter Harvest), “Xuda Ki Kasam” (I Swear By God) and “Ghate Ka Sauda” (A Raw Deal).

In “Sharifan” (Bitter Harvest), Manto unpacks the horrors of rioting done to women during the genocidal violence of Partition. The place is in the grip of rioting. A bullet has pierced Qasim’s thighs. As he rushes home, he finds that his wife is lying dead and his daughter lying close by naked. As the narrative goes:

[...] he received no reply from inside. Qasim pushed open the door. He nearly fell on his face. While he was tiring to get up he realized he was near a... Suddenly Qasim screamed and sat up. Only a yard away a young girl’s dead body, absolutely naked, was lying on the floor. Fair, well- built body, small firm breast..., Qasim’s entire being was shaken up. Inside his soul a scream was born that could touch the sky, but his lips were sealed in a manner that his scream could not escape them. His eyes automatically closed

and yet he covered his face with his hands. A sound emitted from him, “Sharifan.” With his eyes still closed he fished out some clothes and threw them on Sharifan’s dead body. (52)

This scene is very gruesome that tells the real plight and predicament of women, who were subjected to the most perverse treatment that any sadistic imagination could plan. In an unconscious and extremely enraged and frenzied state of mind, Qasim kills a Sikh and three Hindus, with a broken psyche:

Hatchet in hand, Qasim was running in the deserted bazaars like boiling lava. On the crossing, he was faced with a young well- built Sikh. Qasim attacked in a peculiar aimless manner and with such force that Sikh fell like an uprooted tree in a storm [...] A little far away from crossing, he saw some men. Like an arrow, he went towards them. They shouted: “Har- Har Mahadev”. I stead of replying with “Allah-o-Akbar Qasim called them by choicest four-lettered words, flung his hatchet in the air and entered that group. In a few moments, three dead bodies were writhing on the road. (53)

Here, it becomes clear that the utter sense of communalism was a driving force for the outbreak of violence. In such violence of extreme kind, women were the immediate sufferers. By showing such terrible scene, Manto perhaps, is hinting at the fact that how enemy groups acted out their wrath over enemies’ women or daughters.

Qasim with utter anger was moving towards the bazaars that were totally deserted. He entered a street. He; however, realized that all inhabitants were Muslims, he felt miserable. He then turned his lava to another direction. “Entering a bazaar he flung his hatchet in air and once again started shouting the worst possible sewer words concerning mothers and sisters”(53). He went towards a house. Something was written on the door in Hindi. The door was bolted from inside. Like a mad man, Qasim broke open the door with his hatchet. His throat was dry. He started shouting, “come out, come out”. He was very agitated. A door opened slowly and a girl appeared. Qasim asked in a tough voice, “who are you?” “A Hindu” (54). Qasim then threw away his hatchet and pounced on her like a wild beast, throwing her to the ground. He then began to tear her clothes and for half-an-hour he ravaged her like an animal gone out of control. There was no resistance, she had fainted. Later, when Qasim looked at the naked body of girl, he was reminded of his daughter, Sharifan and put on the blanket on the molested girl.

Just then a man entered the house holding a sword and asked him, “who are you?” Qasim was startled. His eyes opened but he could see nothing. The man with a sword shouted, “Qasim!” Qasim was once again startled. He tried to recognize the man but his eyes failed him. The man was very upset. He asked, “what are you doing here?” (54). Qasim pointed towards the blanket. The other man pulled off the blanket. The sword fell from his hand; then he staggered out of the house wailing, “Bimala... Bimala!” (55). The readers thus can guess the further development—a circle of violence and revenge. The story comes to an end with traumatized individuals.

In this story, Manto unravels the moral condemnation of brutal act upon female subjects. By showing his protagonist, Qasim having identified Hindu Bimala as his own daughter, Sharifan, after his brutal treatment towards her, Manto not only retraumatizes Qasim but also the readers.

By the same token, Manto’s “Xuda Ki Kasam” (I Swear By God) provides the historians with sensitive insight into the impact of abduction on ordinary people. It reflects on the emotional trauma of abduction. It also provides valuable insights which have surprisingly been ignored by historians. The narrator of this story is a liaison officer from Pakistan involved in the recovery of abducted women. During his work, he encounters an old Muslim woman, who is searching for her daughter with desperation. With the outbreak of pervasive violence, tens and thousands of women were murdered, raped, abducted and mutilated. The raped and abducted ones were so traumatized that:

[...] some girls had committed suicide on the way, afraid of facing their parents. Some had lost their mental balance as a result of their traumatic experiences. Others had become alcoholics and used abusive and vulgar language when spoken to. (160)

The woman, searching for her daughter refuses to return to Pakistan with the liaison officer, as she is convinced that her daughter is still alive. “Why?” I asked. “‘Because she is beautiful. She is so beautiful that no one can kill her. No one could even dream of hurting her,’ she said in a low whisper” (168). The narrator makes another trip across the border to India and again he happens to find that Muslim woman who:

[...] was no more than a bag of bones now. She could hardly see and tottered about like a blind person, a step at a time. Only one thing hadn’t changed— her faith that her daughter was alive and that no one could kill her. (168)

The pathetic plight of a woman is a site of testimonies of the trauma of the Partition of India especially on women. A dead-alive woman simply wants to her beloved daughter to come. One of the volunteers said the liaison officer, “Don’t waste your time over her. She’s raising mad. It would be good if you take her to Pakistan with you and put her in an asylum” (169). The officer, however, decides to make one last effort to take her to Pakistan. Just at the moment, a young woman looks for a moment, and then walks away. The old woman recognizes her daughter and shouts after the officer, “Bhagbari, Bhagbari... I’ve seen her... I have seen her” (169). He firmly replies, fully aware of what is happening, “I swear on God your daughter is dead” (170). The old woman then collapses on the ground as a bare life—a life which is not yet or no longer.

Manto’s ending to the story reveals perhaps better than anything else that Partition involved the death of family ties as well as of individuals. The character of the old woman, moreover, articulates the uncertainties and anxieties of many relatives waiting to hear of their loved ones. The pathos and occasional futility of the exercise of rehabilitation are laid bare through the use of irony and reversal, as the abducted Muslim woman refuses to recognize her own mother.

It is true that many women did find a new life after being abducted. Happily married to a Sikh youth, Bhagbari does not wish to risk her happiness by remembering this naked, insane woman as her mother. “Being a story of rupture and loss, “Xuda Ki Kasam” shows that the logic of human relationship is more powerful than the logic of religion” (Patole 3).

Another story, “Ghate Ka Sauda” (A Raw Deal) in which the rioters buy a girl apparently belonging to the other community but having abused her the whole night, they discover to their horror that they had been cheated. She, in fact, belonged to their own religious communities. They then decide to go and return her to the seller, apparently to claim the refund as well. As the narrative goes:

Two friends pooled their resources. They selected a girl from a group of ten or twenty and bought her for forty rupees. After having spent the night with her, one of them asked, “What’s your name?”

The man was furious when he heard the girl’s name.

“We were told that you belong to the other religious community!”

“You were told a lie,” the girl replied. The man ran to his friend and said, “That bastard double

crossed us. He palmed off one of our own girls!
Come on, let's take her back." (185)

The story clearly shows that how the woman's body from enemy side becomes a ground to perform their wrath and victory. Here, a woman's body is not only politicized but also turned in to an abject object—the kind of life that exists inside and outside the juridico-political system—completely expendable and exploited by authorities and the conflicting groups to maintain their power.

The production of raped bodies is a tactic for the authorities and the conflicting groups to gain power and control, but once these bodies are produced, they are disregarded and become disposable. As in the case of the perpetrated girl in the above story, she will be disposable in her own community. She will not be fully included in the political as well as legal, economic, and societal system as discussed by Agamben. She will be fated to live as *homo sacer*.

The mentioned stories of Manto, by executing in Tony Kushner's view, "the complexity and richness of holocaust testimony" (275) of the Partition violence, and combining evil and suffering within it, capture the specificity of the Partition violence without being provocative in any way. In doing so, they bring in the humanitarian and moral perspective on the Partition holocaust which helps to evoke the therapeutic effect of the trauma of the Partition.

Bimala in "Sharifan", girls losing mental order in "Xuda Ki Kasam" and perpetrated girl by two men in "Ghate Ka Sauda" are the true victims of biopolitical violence, who are finally reduced into abject objects having no space and identity in their respective communities. They are *muselmann* of Agamben which speak the vastness of trauma without speaking. They are specific form of life which is not yet and no longer.

Literature holds the capacity of creating therapeutic effect of trauma. Literature, Cathy Caruth argues, "enables us to bear witness to events that cannot be completely known and opens our ears to experiences that might have otherwise remained unspoken and unheard" (qtd. in Marder 3). Trauma, no doubt, is very painful but when it is acted out it paves way for the survival. It is the literature that provides spacious room for the acting out of trauma for it denies the closure of trauma. As Felman says:

Literature is a dimension of concrete embodiment and language of infinitude that, in contrast to the language of the law, encapsulates not closure but precisely what in a given legal case refuses to be closed and cannot be closed. It is to this refusal of the trauma to be closed that literature does justice. (qtd. in Marder 5)

The more trauma is acted out, the more it reduces the agony. Good trauma literature should always focus on the possibilities of acting out so as to bring in the healthy and wholesome relationship among the members of the community. Another distinguishing hallmark of good piece of traumatic literature is that it appeals the moral sense of the readers at the expense of ethical sense, which is likely to be contaminated by the germs of identity politics.

The rendition of the trauma of the women in 1947 from the part of Manto is actually a morality-driven transmission with emphasis on human relations "backed by the attribute of being human, such as being a woman or being sick" (Margalit 7). Here, Margalit covertly tries to express that morality occupies the universal values and norms whereas ethics is limited and local in its dimension. To say overtly, the line of morality is apolitical whereas the line of ethics is political and hence, compromising.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, it can be said that Manto's mentioned stories craftily foreground the plight and predicament of abducted, displaced and raped women caused by the biopolitical violence, the violence in which human bodies and lives are targets and focal points of politics and war. Through these stories, the writer attempts to show the most horrible picture of the Partition and its consequences. Due to the patriarchy-unleashed violence perpetrated on women they are ultimately reduced into *homo sacer* and *muselmann* as conceptualized by Agamben. *Muselmann* is a specific form of life which is alive but dead, and dead but alive. The female characters, who suffer from brutal rape, abduction and mutilation in the stories, are nothing but the abject object, which speak the vastness of trauma without speaking. In other words, the victimized women characters and their somatic testimonies verge on the authenticity of their traumas, which history is oblivious by executing identity politics. So, literature is a productive site to project authentic testimonies of traumatic event like the genocidal violence during the partition of India.

REFERENCES

- [1] Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford University Press, 1998.
- [2] Chare, Nichiolas. "The Gap in Context: Giorgio Agamben's Remnants of Auschwitz." *Cultural Critique*, vol.64, 2006, pp. 40-68.
- [3] Duarte, Andre. "Biopolitics and the dissemination of Violence: the Arendtian Critique of the present." http://works.bepress.com/andre_duarte/18.html. Accessed 24 February 2020.

- [4] Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality. Vol. I. An Introduction*. Alane Lane, 1979.
- [5] Hromadzic, Azra. "Female Body and (Ethno) Political Violence."
[http://www.units.muohio.edu/havighurstcenter/publications/documents/hro adzic.pdf](http://www.units.muohio.edu/havighurstcenter/publications/documents/hro%20adzic.pdf) Accessed 24 February 2020.
- [6] Lemke, Thomas "Biopolitical and beyond: On the reception of a vital Focauldian notion."
http://www.biopolitica.cl/docs/Biopolitics_and_beyond.pdf
 > Accessed 21 January 2020.
- [7] Manto, Saadat Hassan. "Xuda Ki Kasam". — *Orphans of the Storm—: Stories on the Partition of India*. Editors. Saros Cowasjee & K.S. Duggal. UBS Publishers Ltd, 1995.
- [8] ---. "Sharifan". *Writings on India's Partition*. Editors. Ramesh Mathur & Mahendra Kulasretha. Simant Publications, 1976.
- [9] --. "Xuda Ki Kasam". — *Orphans of the Storm—: Stories on the Partition of India*. Editors. Saros Cowasjee & K.S. Duggal. UBS Publishers Ltd, 1995.
- [10] Marder, Elissa. "Trauma and Literary Studies: Some "Enabling Questions."" *Reading On*, vol.1, no. 1, 2006, pp. 1-6.
- [11] Margalit, Avishai. *The Ethics of Memory*. Harvard University Press, 2004.
- [12] Pandey, Beerendra. *Historiography of Partition*. The Study— An Institute For IAS, 2012.